

SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATIVE RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY NEWSLETTER

May 2002

1.0 A Foot in the Door: Networking Federal Agencies

Ask any salesperson to name the worst part of his or her job, and you're bound to hear it's "cold calling"—approaching an unknown organization to identify an unknown contact who may or may not have a need for what the person has to offer.

Commissions are far more likely, and a lot easier to earn, when the salesperson and the customer have a relationship.

It's no different when going after an SBIR grant. If you take the time to develop a relationship with those inside the funding agency, your proposal will be more focused, your credibility will be established and your overall competitiveness enhanced.

Who You Gonna Call?

SBIR programs differ from agency to agency, so how you network with the agency varies as well. For example, rather than request proposals to meet needs within the department, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accepts proposals in 11 different topic areas. (<http://www.reeusda.gov/sbir/02topics.htm>). It is up to you to generate the idea, research and document the need, and prepare your proposal.

On the other hand the Department of Defense (DoD) components such as the Army and the Navy are looking for specific solutions for internal military needs. Your technology and capabilities must be judged by the users to be able to meet those needs and provide a practical, expeditious solution.

That distinction results in two different review processes. The Resource Section (6.0) provides an overview on the approaches used by the federal agencies. The DoD has a "line review" process, meaning proposal review is done internally by the line managers and scientists who are potential users of your technology. The USDA does "peer reviews," contracting with people outside of the agency who have direct knowledge of the topic area.

Once you know which approach is used by the agency you are interested in, you will know whom to call.

At the USDA, Montana companies work with Bill Goldner, national program director, SBIR. Goldner assists people with the mechanics of the USDA SBIR program. He answers questions, fosters outreach to draw more people to the program, makes site visits when he can, and even sits down one-on-one with business people to brainstorm ideas.

"We are eager to help," Goldner says. "Our only constraint is time." Drawing on his willingness to help gives you a powerful ally in developing a competitive proposal. At the DoD, you need to network deeper in the department, establishing relationships with the scientists who might have applications for your technology, product or service. These are the people who will review your proposal, so developing name recognition and establishing your credibility with them ahead of time is simply good business strategy.

You can try to identify and connect with these people on your own, but it is easier going through a third party such as the Montana Department of Commerce's (DOC)

SBIR Outreach Program or if you are targeting DoD, MSU Techlink's SBIR Assistance Program.

What Are You Going to Say?

The biggest pitfall many small businesses make in networking is asking for money rather than exploring how they can help the agency achieve its goals, says Ray Friesenhahn, director of the Photonics and Sensors Initiative and coordinator of the SBIR assistance program at MSU TechLink. That is a distinction well known to Ralph Hutcheson, founder of Scientific Materials in Bozeman, and winner of numerous SBIR grants.

"To improve the odds of winning, what you have to do is take what you want to accomplish and fit it into what the agency wants to accomplish. If you are fortunate to get a blend, you have a successful proposal," Hutcheson says.

Once you have established contact, it is important to find the balance between staying in touch and being a pest. Goldner recommends contacting him to report progress as well as when you have questions. Some grantees communicate with their agency only when a report is due, which frequently isn't often enough.

"If you have an usual event, positive or negative, communicate that to your program people at the earliest possible date," Hutcheson says. "If you wait until it is time to write a report, it could get buried and not reacted to for some time. If that happens, you are in trouble."

Judicious contact even when you don't have a proposal in the works is another good networking tactic. "If a company offers technology that is unique and offers some advantages to DoD over current technology, the people in the agency could issue a future SBIR topic geared toward that technology. In that case, the company has a decided advantage," says Friesenhahn.

2.0 At Veridical Research, It's all about Relationships

Frank Marchak couldn't ignore relationship building even if he wanted. His Bozeman-based business, Veridical Research and Design, is a human factors consulting firm specializing in basic and applied research in visual perception and cognition, human-computer interaction design, and usability engineering services.

"What I do is so specialized that there are not many formal grant solicitations out there. I need to seek out potential clients and find out what they need," Marchak says.

Often he knows whom to contact when trying to build those relationships. But when he doesn't, Marchak doesn't hesitate in asking for help.

Two years ago, Marchak took his idea for a Department of Defense (DoD) proposal to Ray Friesenhahn at TechLink. TechLink receives DoD funding to facilitate technology transfers between US Defense labs and small businesses.

"Ray was instrumental in getting contacts in the Army Research Institute," he says. "While I wasn't completely in the dark, the advantage I found in working with Ray was that when I'd call the agency, I was looking for money; when he called, he was looking for information. People tend to be more forthcoming with a neutral party." That particular proposal wasn't funded. A record number of proposals were submitted on that solicitation, making competition extraordinarily tight. However, Veridical Research was recently awarded an SBIR grant from the DoD National Imagery and Mapping Agency (see Awards section), proving that networking pays. Marchak offers the following tips for others applying SBIR funding.

Identify contacts. Use resources such as the Montana Department of Commerce's (DOC) SBIR Outreach Program and MSU TechLink to identify the appropriate people to call.

Network. Draw on your contact base to help however and whenever they can. DOC and TechLink, for instance, can help you learn about potential solicitations as well as give you referral sources for project team members. Past clients are another good source—many of Marchak's government projects have resulted from referrals by past clients.

Stay in touch. "Ongoing personal contact is the biggest factor in developing a relationship with a customer and having them trust you enough to give you the opportunity to really understand what they need done," he says.

Take their perspective. "When you are dealing with a customer, keep your focus on their needs and on how your capabilities can meet those needs, which is something you can do only after you spend the time finding out what their needs are," Marchak concludes.

3.0 Congratulations to the April Phase 0 Winners

Company: Montana Microbial Products LLC
510 East Kent
Missoula, MT 59802
Voice: (406) 542 9404
Phase 0 Title: Enzymatic Hydrolysis and Fermentation of Sugar Beet Pulp: A Model for Biomass for Fuel Ethanol Production
Target Agency: US Department of Agriculture
Principal Investigator: Clifford Bradley

Company: Larix Systems, Inc.
1325 Van Orsdel Road
Helena, MT 59602
Voice: (406) 458-0045
Phase 0 Title: Robust Forest Stand Generator
Target Agency: US Department of Agriculture
Principal Investigator: Mark E. Teply

SBIR Phase 1 Winner

Congratulations go to Veridical Research & Design for winning a Phase 1 SBIR grant from the Department of Defense's National Imagery and Mapping Agency (NIMA).

Company: Veridical Research and Design
PO Box 6503
Bozeman, MT 59771-6503 USA
Voice: (406) 522-9045
Fax: (406) 522-9048
Target Agency: Department of Defense, NIMA
Phase 1: \$99,958
Topic: Imagery Exploitation Applications of Neuroscience
Abstract: Explore and develop applications of neuroscience to imagery intelligence and geospatial analysis for detection, change analysis, extraction, attribution, guided /inferred utility, exploitation or use within NIMA and eventual deployment as tools in open system environments.
Principal Investigator: Frank M. Marchak

WE DO OUR BEST TO IDENTIFY EVERY AWARD WINNER, BUT WE MAY HAVE ACCIDENTALLY MISSED YOUR COMPANY. IF WE HAVE, PLEASE NOTIFY LINDA BRANDER (406) 841-2749 or lbrander@state.mt.us

4.0 Solicitations

Program	Open Solicitations		
	Release Dates	Accepts Proposals	Closing Dates
ED SBIR Contracts	2 Apr 2002	2 Apr 2002	10 Jun 2002
NIH/NIMH SBIR Contracts RFP No. NIMH-02-SBIR -Phase I	28 Mar 2002	28 Mar 2002	28 May 2002
EPA SBIR	28 Mar 2002	28 Mar 2002	23 May 2002
NSF SBIR/STTR for AM & IT only	1 Mar 2002	1 Mar 2002	12 June 2002
NSF SBIR/STTR for BT & EL only	1 Mar 2002	10 Oct 2002	22 Jan 2003
DOT SBIR	15 Feb 2002	15 Feb 2002	1 May 2002
HHS/NIH SBIR/STTR (Grants) Non-Aids Related Topics	15 Jan 2002	15 Jan 2002	1 Apr 2002 1 Aug 2002 1 Dec 2002
HHS/NIH SBIR/STTR (Grants) Aids Related Topics	15 Jan 2002	15 Jan 2002	1 Apr 2002 1 Aug 2002 1 Dec 2002
HHS/CDC SBIR (Grants)	15 Jan 2002	15 Jan 2002	1 Dec 2002
HHS/FDA SBIR (Grants)	15 Jan 2002	15 Jan 2002	1 Apr 2002 1 Aug 2002 1 Dec 2002

For a complete overview of all solicitations go to:

<http://www.zyn.com/sbir/scomp.htm>

The Department of Education CONTRACT Solicitation was released April 2 and proposals are due June 10. However, the GRANT Solicitation has been delayed. Watch for the GRANT Solicitation release sometime in May. The closing date will be adjusted accordingly.

5.0 Conferences & Workshops

- Wyoming SBIR State Conference**
 May 29 & 30
 Thermopolis, Wyoming
 Cost \$75 before May 15, \$100 after.
 For more information go to: http://www.uwyo.edu/sbir/frm_confinfo.html
- National SBIR Conference--Connecting People and Ideas with Resources and Funding**
 June 11-13, 2002
 Washington D. C.
 Cost not yet determined.
 For more information go to: SBIRworld.com
- Montana SBIR Workshop - Inside the Evaluation Process at the US Department of Agriculture's SBIR Program**
 Dr. William Goldner, National SBIR Program Manager, Washington D.C. will present.
 Cost: **Free**
 Additional details will be released by May 5, 2002.
July 1, 2002
 Bozeman, MT
 Double Tree Inn

8:00 AM to 9:00 AM.

July 2, 2002

Billings, MT

MT State University, College of Business

8:00 AM to 9:00 AM.

- **Montana SBIR Workshop** - Understanding & Protecting Your Intellectual Property Rights and Licensing Your Technology

July 11, 2002

Ruby's Reserve Street Inn

Missoula, MT

1:00 PM to 4:30 PM

Dr. Robert Hunter, Hawaii, will be the presenter.

Cost: **Free**

Additional details will be released by May 5, 2002.

- **4th Annual National Institute of Health SBIR Conference**

June 21, 2002

Natcher Conference Center

Bethesda, Maryland

Cost: **Free - Registration mandatory**

For complete conference agenda and on-line registration go to:

<http://web.ncifcrf.gov/fcrdc/conf/sbir>

- **Montana Manufacturing Extension Center Conference**

Compete Smart Manufacturing

October 3-4, 2002

Missoula, MT

Details to be announced at a later date. For questions, contact, 1-800-MEP-4MFG.

- **National Fall SBIR Conference**

October 28-31, 2002

Burlington, VT

For additional information:

<http://www.sbirworld.com/conferences/eventDetails.asp?confId=37&fromPg=home>

6.0 Resources

- United States federal agencies that use the peer review process for SBIR proposals: Agriculture, Education, Energy, National Institute of Health, Environmental Protection Agency, and National Science Foundation.
- United States federal agencies that use the line review process for SBIR proposals: Defense, Commerce, and NASA.
- United States federal agencies that use both a peer and line review process for SBIR proposals: Education, Energy, and Environmental Protection Agency.
- The national SBIR web has a section that facilitates networking and partnership development. <http://www.zyn.com/sbir/sbres/poa/>
- The National Science Foundation has a Matchmaker site to facilitate connections between potential investors and strategic partners. <http://www.eng.nsf.gov/sbir/matchmaker.htm>
- Do you need help finding a technology or a facility at a federal lab? The Federal Lab Consortium (FLC) offers a free Laboratory Locator service to help you navigate through the federal lab system. The FLC Laboratory Locator personnel will search the FLC network for the exact technology or facility you

are seeking. Check out the resources available at the FLC at:

www.federallabs.org

- For assistance with SBIR networking at all federal SBIR programs, contact Linda Brander, DOC, SBIR Outreach Coordinator, (406) 444-7062 or lbrander@state.mt.us

For networking assistance at the Department of Defense, contact Ray Friesenhahn, Director, Photonics and Sensors Initiative (406) 994-7726 or rayf@montana.edu at: www.montana.edu/techlink.

7.0 Subscriber's Comments

Does your company network with any of the federal agencies?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please give an example when networking paid off?

If you are having problems submitting your responses, please email lbrander@state.mt.us.